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AUTHOR Reisner, Elizabeth R; Balasubramaniam, Meena
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ABSTRACT

A study examined the circumstances underlying the school-to-work transition problems of disadvantaged youth and strategies that school systems in Detroit, Pensacola (Florida), New Castle (Indiana), and Pittsburgh have adopted to address these problems. Among the problems studied were lack of information about jobs and careers, too few role models in good jobs, lack of the skills and attitudes needed in the workplace, inadequate access to high quality vocational education programs, employers' negative perceptions and attitudes, and poor labor market conditions for youth. The districts studied exhibited important differences in their circumstances, priorities, and methods for assisting the transition of disadvantaged youth. The study's analysis indicates that program components play key roles in encouraging the creation of employer linkages with disadvantaged youth. Those components are: early intervention; the availability of tutors, mentors, and advocates; supervised work experience; and placement assistance. The study recommends a new federal policy on improving employer linkages with disadvantaged students by expanding local and state activities in each of these service components. The following changes in the Perkins Act are recommended: (1) a statement endorsing the development of better links between disadvantaged youth and employers; (2) language authorizing demonstrations of approaches likely to promote such linkages; and (3) establishment of a new set of required services to disadvantaged youth that are separate from the services required for handicapped youth. (A 33-item bibliography is included.) (CML)

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SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION SERVICES FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH ENROLLED IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Elizabeth R. Reisner

Meena Balasubramaniam

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Disadvantaged youth often experience serious problems in making the transition from high school to permanent jobs. Recent data indicate that these problems persist even during periods of high overall employment. This study examined (1) the circumstances underlying the school-to-work transition problems of disadvantaged youth and (2) strategies that school systems have adopted to address these problems. Conducted as part of the National Assessment of Vocational Education, the study is intended to contribute to the development of federal strategies for improving the delivery of transition services to disadvantaged students enrolled in vocational education.

The study used the broad definition of disadvantaged students that is set forth in the 1984 Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act. It includes youth whose disadvantagement arises from either poverty or poor academic performance. As a practical matter, the study focused on those disadvantaged students whose needs are the greatest.

Analysis of the circumstances that disadvantaged youth experience in making the transition from school to employment indicates that the following problems limit their labor market success:

- Lack of information about jobs and careers

  Because of their relative isolation from the labor market, disadvantaged youth tend to have little access to informal information sources and networks that other young people use to find out about jobs and careers.

- Too few role models in good jobs

  Disadvantaged youth growing up in families that do not include an employed adult have fewer opportunities to (1) learn appropriate

work attitudes and behaviors, (2) obtain information about employment opportunities, and (3) observe the relationship between educational achievement and career success.

- Lack of the skills and attitudes needed in the workplace

  These include specific occupational skills, basic academic skills, personal self-esteem, and what employers call the "work ethic."

- Inadequate access to high quality vocational education programs

  Disadvantaged youth may lack access to such programs because their school systems have few resources or because they allot insufficient funds to the vocational programs in which disadvantaged students enroll. These students may also lack access due to geography, incomplete knowledge of program options, poor scheduling, discouragement from parents and peers, and pressure from academic courses required for high school graduation.

- Employers' negative perceptions and attitudes

  Some employers prefer not to hire disadvantaged youth because they consider them inherently irresponsible and thus poor risks for positions that require personal decisionmaking and employer investments in training.

- Poor labor market conditions for youth

  Disadvantaged youth experience problems finding permanent jobs in some communities because of (1) decreasing numbers of manufacturing jobs, (2) low demand for unskilled workers, and (3) competition from women and immigrants for entry-level positions.

The study team examined these transition-related problems and the vocational education services implemented to address them in four school districts. The four programs exhibit important differences in their circumstances, priorities, and methods for assisting the school-to-work transition of disadvantaged youth:

- Pensacola (Florida) emphasizes basic skills instruction and cooperative education as key transition services. The district sees these services as essential components of its efforts to help disadvantaged students obtain permanent jobs with career ladders.

- Detroit (Michigan) places highest priority on in-school training in occupational skills, with disadvantaged students receiving

from guidance counselors assigned to work exclusively with disadvantaged students.

- New Castle (Indiana) takes advantage of its extensive employer involvement in vocational education to highlight cooperative education placements for its disadvantaged students. The district employs a youth services coordinator who serves as an advisor, mentor, and source of referral information to disadvantaged students enrolled in vocational education.

- Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) has adopted a special focus on early intervention in the lives of very disadvantaged students. Beginning in eighth grade and continuing through high school, these students participate in community-oriented work activities and intensive academic remediation during the school year and summer.

To encourage more successful school-to-work transitions, while accommodating current diversity in local circumstances and preferences, federal vocational education programming could adopt a new priority on improving linkages between disadvantaged youth and employers. The most important results of this priority would be improved information networks for disadvantaged students to learn about careers and more student exposure to role models able to demonstrate the attitudes and skills that are important in the workplace. Additional results would include greater employer involvement in improving programs that serve disadvantaged students.

Our analysis indicates that certain program components play key roles in encouraging the creation of employer linkages with disadvantaged youth. They are:

- <u>Early intervention</u>

  The main purposes of early intervention are (1) to identify students who are at risk of dropping out and provide them with special services that will help them stay in school until graduation and (2) to provide career information and work experiences that will permit these students to plan realistically for employment and to understand the relationship between education and job success.

- Availability of tutors, mentors, and advocates

  Whatever other formal responsibilities these adults may have, they also serve as role models and advisors for the disadvantaged students with whom they work and as intermediaries with students' current and potential employers.

- Supervised work experience

  This component, especially when students are carefully matched with jobs and are paid, offers them the chance to try out the occupational and employability skills they have learned in school and to experience the demands and satisfactions of employment. Previous research indicates that these opportunities are useful to students in making realistic, mature decisions about their future education and employment.

- Placement assistance

  Because disadvantaged students tend to lack informal access to help in finding an initial permanent job, placement assistance from the vocational education program is particularly important to them.

A new federal priority on improving employer linkages with disadvantaged students could be implemented through expansion of local and state activities in each of these service components.

Possible changes in the Perkins Act that would improve transition services to disadvantaged youth include the following:

- A statement in the law endorsing the development of better links between disadvantaged youth and employers;

- Language authorizing demonstrations of approaches likely to promote such linkages, including approaches to implementing each of the program components described above; and

- Establishment of a new set of required services to disadvantaged youth, which are separate from the services required for handicapped youth.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank the many able educators who provided information and assistance to us as we conducted this study. They helped us understand the special needs of disadvantaged students in completing the transition from school to jobs, and they showed us the special services that their vocational education (and related) programs provide to assist and support that transition. In particular, we would like to thank the administrators, teachers, other staff, and students in the vocational education programs in the following school systems:

Escambia County (FL) Public Schools, serving Pensacola

Detroit Public Schools

New Castle (IN) Public Schools

Pittsburgh Public Schools

The study also benefited from the contributions of three experts who prepared commissioned papers on topics related to the school-to-work transition of disadvantaged youth. Their papers are being published separately by the National Assessment of Vocational Education. They are John Bishop of Cornell University, James E. Rosenbaum of Northwestern University, and Calvin R. Stone of the Madison (WI) Metropolitan School District.

Finally, we are grateful for the support and assistance of our project officer for the study, David Goodwin of the U.S. Department of Education. He provided invaluable guidance throughout the design, data collection, analysis, and reporting phases of the study.

The study team included Elizabeth R. Reisner, Meena Balasubramaniam, and Nancy E. Adelman of Policy Studies Associates. In addition, Margaret Terry Orr of the Academy for Educational Development served as a consultant to the study.

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I. Introduction

As their high unemployment rates indicate, disadvantaged youth often experience serious problems in making the transition from high school to employment. In recent years, these problems have persisted even in labor markets characterized by high overall rates of employment. When disadvantaged youth find employment, their jobs tend to last for only short periods of time, require few skills, pay low wages, and offer few opportunities for advancement. Although the rate of employment increases for disadvantaged youth as they grow older, their wages and career security do not.

The growing body of knowledge on vocational education offers no easy solutions to this stubborn set of problems. At the most elementary level, many of the youth with the poorest employment prospects are simply not in school and therefore have no opportunity to benefit from the help that vocational education programs might provide. Even for disadvantaged youth who are in school and enrolled in vocational courses, however, vocational education programs may not be equipped to address the special needs that they will experience in making the transition to permanent employment.

For students who are disadvantaged by poverty and low educational achievement, these needs often stem from a lack of family and community connections with employers and the absence of role models who can demonstrate the behaviors that employers expect and the rewards associated with job success. Disadvantaged youth are also especially likely to experience employment-related problems arising from poor reading and math skills and from a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem.

This report presents the results of a study that examined strategies school systems employ in vocational education programs to improve the employment opportunities of disadvantaged youth. The overall purpose of the study was to assist in assessing the adequacy of provisions in the 1984 Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act that are concerned with improving vocational education services for disadvantaged youth. Because of their special importance to this population, the study focused on school-to-work transition services that vocational education programs provide to disadvantaged students. In addition, the study considered strategies that could be used under the Perkins Act to improve the delivery of transition services to these students.

As discussed in subsequent chapters, the study concludes that conditions of poverty and low educational achievement cause disadvantaged youth to need special help in moving from secondary school to permanent employment. Although high school vocational programs typically offer some transition services, disadvantaged students tend to need additional help in developing constructive connections to employers and careers. According to our analysis, program components that can play key roles in promoting linkages between employers and disadvantaged youth include (1) early intervention that affords exposure to jobs and careers, (2) the assignment of professionals and paraprofessional staff to serve as tutors and mentors, (3) supervised work experience, and (4) placement assistance. Because these components tend to be costly and somewhat peripheral to the central activities of many vocational education programs, federal encouragement and other assistance may be needed to promote their development and implementation. A new federal priority on improving these linkages for

disadvantaged students could result in (1) better information networks about careers and jobs, (2) more exposure to appropriate role models, (3) greater employer input into curricular decisions, and (4) heightened employer involvement as resources for vocational education programs.

The study used the definition of "disadvantaged" that is set forth in Section 521(12) of the Perkins Act:

> The term "disadvantaged" means individuals (other than handicapped individuals) who have economic or academic disadvantages and who require special services and assistance in order to enable them to succeed in vocational education. Such term includes individuals who are members of economically disadvantaged families, migrants, individuals who have limited English proficiency and individuals who are dropouts from, or who are identified as potential dropouts from, secondary school.

As a practical matter, however, our attention in this study has focused on those disadvantaged students whose problems and needs are the greatest. These students tend be to those who are the most likely to drop out of school and whose personal circumstances create serious impediments to finding and retaining jobs after high school.

We have defined transition services to include a wide range of activities intended to help students move smoothly from high school to permanent jobs. When offered as part of a vocational education program, these services are usually provided as supplements to occupational training courses, although transition services are sometimes provided to students who are not enrolled in any occupational training. We have clustered the wide variety of transition services into eight broad areas, as follows:

- Activities to familiarize students with possible careers (known as "career exploration");
- Training in personal behaviors important in obtaining and keeping a good job, such as punctuality, appropriate grooming and dress, the ability to understand the employer's interests, as well as

knowledge about how to look for a job (known as "employability skills");

- Training in skills needed to manage one's personal affairs, including personal decisionmaking, management of personal finances and public transportation, personal health care, and successful child rearing (known as "life skills");

- Activities to improve reading and math competencies (known as "basic skills");

- Supervised experience in the workplace, either paid or unpaid (known as "work experience");

- Services that are not directly related to obtaining or holding a job but that make it possible to participate in training-related activities, including counseling, transportation, and child care (known as "supportive services");

- Assistance in identifying job openings and in applying for a job (known as "placement assistance"); and

- Assistance in dealing with problems that arise after starting a job (known as "follow-up assistance").

Examination of these areas indicates that, while some of these services can occur at the end of high school (e.g., training in employability skills, placement assistance), others can occur at the beginning and hence before occupational skill training commences (e.g., remedial services in basic skills, career exploration). Similarly, some of these services lend themselves to integration into a program of occupational skill training (e.g., training in employability skills, work experience, placement assistance, follow-up assistance), while others will tend to be provided separately (e.g., life skills, supportive services). Although remedial services in basic skills are generally not integrated into occupational skill training, many occupational programs include occupationally related math and reading instruction in their curricula (e.g., food services programs that use recipes to teach vocabulary and measurements).

Disadvantaged youth are not the only students who benefit from transition services. Vocational education participants who are not disadvantaged also need and utilize these services to some extent. What separates disadvantaged youth from other vocational education participants in this matter is the greater importance of school-based transition services to the disadvantaged and the fact that they are less likely to receive this assistance from outside sources, such as relatives, peers, and community contacts. Naturally, this distinction is particularly critical for those students who are the most disadvantaged. For them, the vocational education program may be virtually their only source of direct help in moving from high school to employment.

The Federal Role in Delivering Special Transition Services to Disadvantaged Youth Enrolled in Vocational Education

Although the Perkins Act establishes special resources and requirements for vocational education services to disadvantaged students, it does not acknowledge the range of special needs that disadvantaged youth experience in moving from vocational education to employment, nor does it recognize any particular strategies, except counseling, to assist that transition. Instead, it provides funds for special services to disadvantaged students and provides incentives for states and school systems to use their own resources in assisting this population.

The Perkins requirements for serving the disadvantaged parallel its provisions for the handicapped. Indeed, the law imposes the same requirements on the treatment of the two groups for purposes of (1) ensuring equal access to vocational programs, (2) notifying students and parents

about available services, and (3) requiring the provision of special services to individual students.

Provisions That Govern the Funding of Services to the Disadvantaged

The focus of the Perkins Act provisions for the disadvantaged is the setaside requirements for Basic State Grants (Section 202), which mandate that 22 percent of each state's grant be used for services to disadvantaged individuals. In fiscal year (FY) 1988, $163,400,000 was available under Perkins Basic State Grants for services to disadvantaged persons under this setaside. The law's restrictions on the use of this relatively small amount of funds are intended to leverage their effect.

As stated in Section 201(c)(2), these funds may not be used to pay the base costs of services to disadvantaged persons but may be used only for "the federal share of expenditures limited to supplemental or additional staff, equipment, materials, and services not provided to other individuals in vocational education that are essential for disadvantaged individuals to participate in vocational education." Moreover, "If the conditions of disadvantaged individuals require a separate program, each state may use such funds for the federal share of the costs of the services and activities in separate vocational education programs for disadvantaged individuals which exceed the average per-pupil expenditures for regular services and activities of the eligible recipients."

According to Section 502(a)(3)(A), the "federal share" may equal only "50 percent of the costs of vocational education services and activities." Thus, the Perkins funds may be used to pay for 50 percent of the costs for supplemental services to disadvantaged persons, which are over and above the costs of vocational education services provided to the nondisadvantaged

population. Because state and local funds must be used to cover the remaining 50 percent, this provision constitutes a matching requirement.

Provisions That Govern the Uses of Perkins Funds for the Disadvantaged

The "supplemental or additional staff, equipment, materials, and services" for which Perkins funds may be used are intended to permit "disadvantaged individuals to participate in vocational education," according to Section 201. Although this purpose does not refer to activities promoting successful transition to employment, it does not exclude these activities, since successful participation in vocational education may include assistance in transition to jobs for participants seeking employment. Section 204(c), which lists the services required to be provided to handicapped and to disadvantaged students enrolled in vocational education programs, includes only one service directly related to students' school-to-work transition--"(4) counseling services designed to facilitate the transition from school to post-school employment and career opportunities." Other required services include the following:

> "(1) Assessment of the interests, abilities, and special needs of such student with respect to completing successfully the vocational education program;
>
> "(2) Special services, including adaptation of curriculum, instruction, equipment, and facilities, designed to meet the needs described in clause (1);
>
> "(3) Guidance, counseling, and career development activities conducted by professionally trained counselors who are associated with the provision of such special services. . . ."

Study Design

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) commissioned this study as part of its response to the requirement in the Perkins Act that the Secretary conduct a National Assessment of Vocational Education (NAVE). Although

several large, survey-based projects for the NAVE examined vocational education services to disadvantaged students, this study is unique in its focus on the activities that secondary vocational education programs implement to facilitate these students' transition from high school to employment. In examining the federal policy implications of these needs and services, the study has asked (1) whether federal law, in particular the Perkins Act, should explicitly encourage or require transition services for disadvantaged youth and (2) if so, what legislative tools would be most appropriate to encourage the success of transition services.

To achieve these purposes, the study addressed several key questions:

- What special problems do disadvantaged youth experience in making the transition from high school to employment?
- What services do disadvantaged youth receive in vocational education programs to assist the transition process?
- Should federal resources be directed towards improving and expanding transition services for disadvantaged students? If so, are there particular transition services that are especially appropriate for federal attention in Perkins?

The succeeding chapters of the report address each of these questions in turn.

Because the study is intended to contribute to a consideration of the Perkins Act, two important boundaries for the study were necessary. First, the study looks principally at services provided within the context of vocational education. Schools enrolling disadvantaged youth sometimes provide services under programs for dropout prevention or remedial education that are similar, in terms of content and recipients, to transition services in vocational education programs. The services described and analyzed in this report are limited to those provided through vocational education programs only, unless otherwise noted. The study's second boundary was that

it looked only at programs serving students enrolled in secondary schools, thus eliminating consideration of services to (1) school-age youth who have dropped out of school and (2) students enrolled in postsecondary institutions.

The study generated data through three activities. The first was a review of previous research related to the study's key questions. In this activity, the study team obtained and reviewed articles and reports addressing each of the study questions. These sources included national surveys, analyses of successful (and unsuccessful) projects, and analyses of related services provided to disadvantaged youth.

The second activity was a series of site visits to vocational education projects currently implementing transition services to promote the successful school-to-work transition of disadvantaged youth. The criteria for selecting sites were that (1) each must deliver the types of services that are the subject of this inquiry (i.e., services that assist disadvantaged youth in secondary-level vocational education programs to move successfully from high school to permanent jobs) and (2) together they must demonstrate diversity in terms of needs and service delivery strategies. Using these criteria, the study team reviewed previous research and consulted with knowledgeable sources to select four sites--Detroit, Michigan; New Castle, Indiana; Pensacola, Florida; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Site visitors utilized interview guides and debriefing formats that were designed to produce descriptions of transition services in each site and to permit conclusions across sites.

To enrich the information available for analysis, the study team also commissioned three papers from experts in relevant fields. The authors are

John H. Bishop of Cornell University, James E. Rosenbaum of Northwestern University, and Calvin R. Stone of the Madison (Wisconsin) Metropolitan School District.

II. School-To-Work Transition Problems of Disadvantaged Youth

National employment data regularly remind us of the low employment and labor force participation rates of disadvantaged youth, defined for statistical purposes as young people who are poor or live in an inner city or have dropped out of high school or are members of racial or ethnic minority groups. For example, consider the following indicators developed by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and reported by Markey (1988):

- In June 1988, the unemployment rate of 16-19 year-olds living in metropolitan poverty areas was 28 percent, exactly twice that of youth living in metropolitan nonpoverty areas and nonmetropolitan nonpoverty areas.

- In 1986, 30 percent of female dropouts aged 16-24 were unemployed, a rate that was 2.5 times that of female graduates. Among males, 20 percent of youth dropouts were unemployed, compared to 10 percent of graduates.

- In June 1988, the unemployment rate of 16-19 black youth was 34 percent compared to 14 percent for white youth of the same age. This comparison underestimates the actual unemployment of black youth, however, because it only includes youth who are actively looking for work; in June 1988, only 39 percent of black youth aged 16-19 were in the labor force (i.e., working or looking for work), compared to 60 percent of white youth.

While alarming, these statistics do little to suggest the public policy changes that could improve the employment prospects of these youth.

This chapter looks beyond the statistics to describe the major conditions that limit the employment options of this population, emphasizing those that vocationally-related programs and services might influence. These conditions, which are tightly interrelated, primarily affect disadvantaged youth by separating them from the world of work and, in particular, from accurate information, role models, job-related skills,

high quality vocational programs, and favorable employer predispositions, all of which can help them obtain permanent jobs after high school.

Lack of Information About Jobs and Careers

Disadvantaged youth, especially those living in high-poverty areas, often lack the informal information sources and networks that other young people use to learn about jobs and careers. This deprivation makes it especially difficult for the disadvantaged to make good career choices and to obtain initial permanent jobs. Without good information sources in their families and neighborhoods, disadvantaged youth are likely to rely on unrealistic or misleading sources such as television or their equally uninformed peers, as they decide what types of careers to pursue.

When they look for their first permanent jobs, disadvantaged youth are likely to lack the personal employment contacts, such as family, relatives, and friends, who tend to be especially effective job search channels (as discussed in Ginsberg, 1982; Lerman, as cited in Freeman & Holzer, 1986; Mangum, 1987; Rees & Gray, as cited in Freeman & Wise, 1982). According to Rees and Gray, employed parents and siblings are particularly helpful resources to a young person who is looking for a permanent job, compared to guidance counselors, teachers, and employment agencies. The lack of employment networks is particularly serious in light of evidence that employers prefer these informal recruitment channels over formal ones (Bishop, 1985; Peterson & Rabe, 1981; Mangum, 1987). According to these researchers, employers turn to informal channels because they believe they are less costly, generate more and better information, and yield employees who are more productive and likely to stay with the organization.

According to McPartland and Dawkins (1985), informal recruitment channels tend to benefit middle-class youth. The social networks to which these students are attached are more useful for access to high-paying, high-skill jobs than are the social networks to which disadvantaged youth belong. Among disadvantaged persons, whites are more likely to use social networks to find private sector jobs; blacks, on the other hand, are more likely to look for public sector jobs, largely through civil service applications and referrals from community agencies. Because private sector jobs create more channels for subsequent job searches, disadvantaged blacks tend to be deprived of the useful information, connections, and contacts such networks provide.

In addition to lacking informal networks, disadvantaged youth may also lack first-hand experience in the labor market, as after-school or summer employees. Although some schools offer work experience programs to remedy this deficiency, as discussed in Chapters III and IV, the programs sometimes exclude students with poor achievement or attendance records and students whom they anticipate will be hard to place with employers (Parsons, 1987; Welch & Erwin, 1986).

Research findings regarding problems created by a lack of job-related information are confirmed by data collected directly from disadvantaged students, which indicate that the lack of information about job options, labor market conditions, and wages hinders their transition from school to work (Ford Foundation, 1983; West & Newton, 1983).

Lack of Successful Role Models in Good Jobs

About 50 percent of all disadvantaged youth (higher for those who are black) grow up in single-parent families, and many others do not live with

their natural parents (Ginsberg, 1982). In addition to material impoverishment, these youth suffer other serious disadvantages related to the absence of successful role models (as described by researchers such as Ginsberg; Freeman & Holzer, 1986; Freeman & Wise, 1982; Junge, Daniels, & Karmos, 1984, as cited in Welch & Erwin, 1986; Weber, 1986):

- They lack the family support necessary to instill a positive work ethic and develop employability skills.
- They lack the intellectual and emotional stimulation needed for optimal cognitive and affective development.
- They fail to develop personal confidence and self-esteem.
- They have few opportunities to learn about the world beyond their immediate environment.
- They come in contact with relatively few adults from whom they can learn to associate educational achievement with employment success.

Other evidence supports this analysis of the importance of employed role models. For example, youth in families where the household head is unemployed are less likely to seek employment for themselves (Meyer & Wise, as cited in Freeman & Wise, 1982). Several studies have concluded that the absence of appropriate role models contributes to low self-esteem among disadvantaged youth, which in turn impairs their employability (Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations [LACCHR], 1985; Mangum & Walsh, 1978). Conversely, young disadvantaged blacks in particular are more likely to obtain and hold jobs when adult members of their families are employed (Freeman, as cited in Freeman & Holzer, 1986; Lerman, as cited in Freeman & Holzer), and disadvantaged youth in general are more likely to become employed if the employed relative is a male (Rees & Gray, as cited in Freeman & Wise, 1982).

Reliance on welfare appears to be a particularly strong disincentive to youth employment. Research suggests that youth from welfare families have fewer role models to emulate in learning appropriate work attitudes and behaviors and in obtaining information and connections to permanent jobs (Freeman & Holzer, 1986; Smith, Walker, & Baker, 1987). According to a local vocational education director interviewed for this study, low-income youth from welfare families generally want jobs but may not seek the required training because they cannot see the relationship between training and jobs. Also, high welfare payments may deter youth from looking for paid employment at entry-level wages (Ginsberg, 1982; Mangum & Walsh, 1978).

Lack of Skills and Attitudes Needed in the Workplace

A third set of circumstances that inhibits the job success of disadvantaged youth is their lack of those skills and attitudes that employers typically value. Among the essential skills that disadvantaged youth may lack are:

- Specific occupational skills (Passmore & Wircenski, 1981, as cited in Sitlington, 1986; Sitlington, 1986);
- Basic skills in reading and math (Bottoms & Scott, 1980; Elmore, 1980, as cited in Peterson & Rabe, 1981; Ford Foundation, 1983; Freeman & Holzer, 1986; Freeman & Wise, 1982; NAVE First Interim Report, 1988; Scully, 1982; Sitlington, 1986; Wircenski & Irwin, 1982);
- Job seeking skills (Bottoms & Scott, 1980; Wircenski & Irwin, 1982);
- Employability skills (Bottoms & Scott; Scully, 1982); and
- Everyday living skills, such as managing personal finances and using public transportation.

Employers vary in the importance they attach to specific occupational skills, and in many jobs (and labor markets) the lack of such skills is not

a barrier to employment. However, the lack of employability skills--such as the ability to communicate effectively, good self-concept, responsibility on the job, and ability to cope with personal problems--are major obstacles for some disadvantaged youth, impeding their ability to obtain a permanent job and, once obtained, to keep it (Welch & Erwin, 1986; McPartland & Dawkins, 1985).

According to administrators in vocational programs visited for this study, a major obstacle to obtaining jobs with career ladders is the poor reading and math skills that disadvantaged youth tend to exhibit. The experience in these vocational education programs is that employers value basic skills and that these skills strongly influence the job entry of youth. Many students who complete high school--as well as dropouts--have low literacy levels, making it hard for them to respond to a help-wanted ad or fill out a job application correctly.

In addition, the lack of a high school diploma, which employers sometimes use as a screening device, tends to handicap disadvantaged youth. In fact, unemployment tends to be concentrated among those with the lowest levels of education (Freeman & Wise, 1982). According to Hamilton (1986), the diploma does not limit access to jobs <u>per se</u> but does limit access to jobs with career advancement potential.

Ginsberg (1982), Akamine and Dillard (1986), and Weber (1986) attribute the difficulties disadvantaged youth face in entering the labor market to the inadequacies of their schooling. According to Ginsberg (p. 78), "The incontrovertible fact that must be acknowledged is that the school does not provide a useful educational experience for a great many young people, and this failure of the schools adds immeasurably to the problems of these young

people in making a satisfactory transition to the world of work." Ginsberg concludes that many disadvantaged youth do poorly in school either because they are bored or stereotyped as underachieving and undisciplined or are advanced from one grade to another without demonstrating knowledge of minimum competencies.

Disadvantaged youths' job options are also limited by their negative attitudes and beliefs. Most importantly, they tend to exhibit low aspirations and expectations for themselves (Freeman & Holzer, 1986) as well as low self-esteem and little sense of control over their opportunities (Campbell, Gardner, & Winterstein, 1984). They are also less willing to accept low-paying, entry-level jobs than other youth, due in part to their greater earning potential on the street (Freeman & Holzer). For some disadvantaged youth, negative attitudes result from previous unsuccessful work experiences, criminal involvement, or emotional problems (Bottoms & Scott, 1980). Finally, Wircenski and Irwin (1982) report that disadvantaged youth themselves perceive that their lack of academic competencies, lack of skills for working in groups, and low motivation are barriers to their successful employment.

Inadequate Access to High Quality Vocational Education

Disadvantaged youth sometimes experience limits on their access to high quality vocational education programs. Findings from two studies (Benson, 1987; LACCHR, 1985) indicate that disadvantaged youth are not offered the range of programmatic choices available to the general vocational education population. According to these researchers, insufficient resources are allotted to the training of disadvantaged youth--either because they are enrolled in school districts with too few resources or because they enroll

in vocational programs that are underfunded, compared to other vocational programs available within their districts.

Access to high quality occupational training programs can also be denied to disadvantaged youth by their geographical distance from good vocational program offerings (if they reside in rural areas or in urban communities that are distant from desirable vocational programs), incomplete knowledge of program options, inconvenient scheduling of program offerings, and discouragement from parents and peers who believe that vocational education is undesirable (Benson, 1987; Hayward, Adelman, & Apling, 1988).

Another barrier to high quality vocational education is rising academic standards for high school graduation. In site visits conducted for this study, local project directors said that increased graduation requirements in math, English, science, and other courses have led to declining enrollments in vocational education for three reasons:

- Students do not have time in their school schedules to take vocational courses because of the increased credit hours required in academic subjects.
- School principals are allotting more student time to subjects on which they will be tested for graduation, taking students' time away from vocational education courses.
- Budget constraints have forced cutbacks in summer school programs, in which disadvantaged students previously took vocational courses missed during the school year.

The overall effect of increasing academic standards and graduation requirements has been to constrict students' access to vocational education programs (Benson, 1987; Ford Foundation, 1983; Hayward et al., 1988). This may have a particularly deleterious effect on the vocational preparation opportunities available to disadvantaged high school students.

Employers' Negative Perceptions and Expectations

Some employers prefer not to hire disadvantaged youth even for entry-level positions because they consider them to be inherently irresponsible and thus poor risks for positions that require personal responsibility and employer training (Hamilton, 1986; Mangum, 1987). Employers often complain about disadvantaged youths' poor employability skills--absenteeism and tardiness, lack of interest in their jobs, tendency to ignore instructions and make costly mistakes, and unwillingness to learn (Johnson as cited in Mangum, 1987; Markowicz, 1984; Wircenski & Irwin, 1982; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], 1981; Pennsylvania State University, 1981; Winer & Kane, 1985). The employers in Johnson's review said that the major areas in which disadvantaged youth needed improvement in their preparation for work were: concern for productivity, pride in quality of work, dependability, work habits, follow-through on assignments, attitude towards the company and other workers, ability to write and speak effectively, ability to follow instructions, and ambition and motivation. This is a formidable list of deficits that suggests, among other things, that these employers hold very low expectations for the job-related contributions of this population.

Poor Labor Market Conditions for Youth

Although not amenable to influence from vocational education programs, certain labor market conditions also contribute to the need for special transition services for disadvantaged youth. These conditions tend to be spotty in their effect, affecting disadvantaged youth in some regions and communities more than others. They include the following:

- Few jobs connected to manufacturing

  Manufacturing jobs, which previously supplied many entry-level jobs for disadvantaged youth, have decreased with plant closings and with the outmigration of jobs from urban to suburban areas (Anderson, 1981; Ford Foundation, 1983; Ginsberg, 1982). Job openings in manufacturing that do appear are generally filled with workers who were previously laid off, rather than with young workers.

- Low demand for unskilled workers

  The skill requirements of the few remaining manufacturing jobs in inner cities have increased. According to an administrator in one vocational program we visited, "Repetitive assembly line jobs that demand little skill are being replaced by jobs that call for specialized skills. . . . Now there is greater demand for skilled workers who can communicate, are adaptable, have initiative and team spirit, get along with people, and know how to work cooperatively." These skill requirements can make the labor market less accessible to disadvantaged youth.

- Competition from other entry-level workers

  Women and immigrants are increasingly competing with disadvantaged youth for entry-level positions (Anderson, 1981; Ford Foundation, 1983; Freeman & Holzer, 1986; Ginsberg, 1982).

An important distinguishing characteristic of disadvantaged youth is that they tend to live in economically depressed areas where employment opportunities are limited. These areas may be neighborhoods within thriving communities or they may be entire regions. According to some researchers, living in a poverty area reduces the probability of being employed by 10 percent, other factors being equal, due to the lack of jobs, the low quality of education that often characterizes poor areas (Ford Foundation, 1983; Freeman & Wise, 1982; Rees & Gray, as cited in Freeman & Wise, 1982), and the low priority that families in these areas may attach to education as they struggle to survive. Living in an economically depressed area with few job opportunities, combined with the need for immediate income, also exerts pressure on disadvantaged youth to accept whatever jobs are available,

irrespective of whether the positions are related to their previous training (Rumberger, 1983; Scully, 1982).

Conclusion

Disadvantaged youth--especially those who are very poor, who live in inner cities, who are minorities, or who have dropped out of school--constitute the core of the youth unemployment problem. These youth face obstacles such as lack of information about jobs and careers, too few good role models, lack of the skills and attitudes that employers value, inadequate access to high quality vocational education programs, negative perceptions and attitudes on the part of employers, and poor labor market conditions. Together these obstacles can act as major barriers to employment in good jobs with career potential. Although improvements in labor markets are outside the potential influence of vocational education programs, the other obstacles can be constructively addressed through changes in current programming.

III. Transition Services to Disadvantaged Youth in Four Communities

The vocational education programs in the four communities visited in this study demonstrate a variety of local approaches to addressing the problems described in the preceding chapter. Both their successful strategies and their continuing problems suggest avenues for improving federal support to vocational education.

Pensacola: Focus on Basic Skills Instruction and Subsidized Work Experience

Located in Florida's panhandle, Pensacola depends on its port and adjacent military bases for employment and other economic activity. Although these employers provide the region with an abundant supply of entry-level jobs, relatively few of these positions offer either career ladders or good benefits. Unemployment is low, but so are wages. A key goal of the business community is to attract high-tech industry into the region, and it has looked to the schools and colleges to improve the skills of the area's work force and thus help draw such employers.

Job-related Needs of Disadvantaged Youth

Understandably, vocational educators and employment training personnel do not see entry-level employment as the principal need of their program participants. (One administrator said that anyone with "a positive attitude and normal intelligence" can obtain a job in Pensacola.) They believe that the greatest need of Pensacola's disadvantaged youth is to develop basic skills, especially in reading and math, which will enable them to obtain good jobs with career potential. They base this belief on statements from employers and on their own experiences in helping students obtain jobs.

Program administrators also emphasize that disadvantaged youth should be kept in school until graduation, which they see as a priority on its own as well as a means of improving students' transition to employment.

In addition, administrators stress that disadvantaged youth must learn the "work ethic," which they define as the ability and willingness to understand and accept the employer's viewpoint. In this regard, one administrator said, "Twenty-five year-olds are easier to place than younger people, because they are more mature, tolerant, and likely to understand what the employer wants." He said that disadvantaged students need to learn "punctuality, communications skills, personal finance, and appropriate dress and grooming." These needs arise, he said, because local disadvantaged youth include many "third-generation AFDC recipients, who lack any work ethic and who are used to interacting with government agencies in a dependency relationship." They are "more reluctant to accept dead-end jobs than middle-class students are," according to this administrator, because they see themselves as likely to be stuck in such jobs permanently, while middle-class students see dead-end jobs as a temporary means of earning extra money.

Occupational Training

Almost all occupational skill training provided by the school system's vocational education program occurs in the district's vocational center, a modern shared-time facility offering skill training to adults and out-of-school youth as well as high school students. Advisory councils, composed of business people, assist in curricular development in each occupational area. One of the areas in which they provide advice is the design of

occupational competencies, which are used as the bases for course curricula and student testing.

Transition Services

Two important features distinguish the transition services for disadvantaged students participating in Pensacola's vocational education program. First, services are closely coordinated with activities under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), which allows provision of a more intensive array of services to disadvantaged youth than would be possible with vocational education resources alone. Second, the transition program targets improvements in basic reading and math skills with an emphasis on computer-assisted instruction (CAI).

From the perspective of the disadvantaged student, this programming means that the student has a series of special supports or assurances to use while participating in the district's regular vocational program. The JTPA linkage also means that the student can be virtually assured of a cooperative education placement while in high school, which in itself gives many students a strong incentive to stay in school. The student is also assured of an opportunity to improve his or her reading and math skills in an individualized, self-paced program.

JTPA coordination. The local JTPA Private Industry Council subcontracts all JTPA training activities for youth to the school system (the Escambia County Public Schools). Under this performance-based agreement, the school system uses JTPA funds (currently $587,000, out of a total district budget of $196 million) to provide two major categories of services to JTPA-eligible youth: (1) CAI in basic skills and (2) wage subsidies (paid directly by the Private Industry Council) to employers

hiring JTPA-eligible youth in cooperative education placements. In addition to these opportunities, the introduction of JTPA resources is widely believed to have energized the district's vocational education system by bringing new priorities and people into the decisionmaking arena and increasing the emphasis on serving disadvantaged students.

The current partnership between JTPA and vocational education began in 1985, when $100,000 in JTPA funds were made available to the state education agency's JTPA coordinator. He had only a month to obligate the funds, and he wanted to use them in a program aimed at lowering the dropout rate. After a few telephone calls, he found that Pensacola was willing to put an ambitious program together quickly. As soon as the grant was approved, the school district purchased a computer system and software designed to improve reading and math skills among low-achieving students. This collaboration initiated a relationship between the local JTPA administrators and the district, which has grown to include a number of other activities.

Basic skills instruction. Since 1986, the school system has used its own resources and JTPA funds from the local Private Industry Council and the state education agency to expand the CAI program. In addition to serving more students, it also now provides instruction during summer and evening sessions. According to Beatrice Gross, who described Pensacola's CAI Youth Competency Dropout Prevention program in The Christian Science Monitor (April 5, 1988):

> Students [participating in CAI] spend 20 minutes a day in the "lab" at a computer screen, reading problems and answering questions. Although students may be in the same class, they will not be answering the same question. Each works at his or her own level, which ensures 70 to 80 percent success. If a student makes repeated mistakes, the program gives him easier problems; if he does well, the questions get harder. . . .

> The project is supported, in part, by the Private Industry Council, which administers federal money set aside under JTPA for at-risk students. "We give the schools $348 each time an eligible kid gains one and a half years in math or reading," says Jim Boggs, the council's executive director. "The first year, only two of the 374 JTPA youngsters dropped out. Those who stayed 'earned' the schools a total of $83,000 for their academic gains." The schools used the money to expand the program.

Employability training. In addition to basic skills remediation, all vocational education students in Pensacola, including those who are disadvantaged, receive employability training that is geared to the attainment of specific competencies. Each occupational teacher in the shared-time center is responsible for teaching these competencies.

Work experience. Pensacola's vocational program emphasizes cooperative education for all twelfth-graders. Disadvantaged twelfth-graders whose low family income makes them JTPA-eligible can be placed in jobs in which JTPA reimburses their employers for 50 percent of their wages for the first four weeks of employment.

Occupational teachers in the shared-time center are responsible for arranging cooperative education placements for students in their occupational areas. Occupational specialists in each high school (who are certified teachers) perform a similar role for students not enrolled in the shared-time center. Both groups of teachers report that the availability of the JTPA wage subsidies makes it easier to find placements for those disadvantaged students whom employers might otherwise reject as poor job risks. Once placed, students participating in cooperative education meet regularly with a teacher in their occupational area to review employability topics and discuss work-related problems.

Other services. The shared-time center provides child care for disadvantaged and other students, who are in turn required to participate in informal parenting classes.

Placement. Teachers in the shared-time center and the occupational specialists in the high schools are responsible for assisting students to find permanent jobs before they graduate. JTPA-eligible students receive extra help through the job search and placement activities of the JTPA administrative office and U.S. Employment Service. Program staff said that finding a permanent job is not difficult but that finding jobs with career ladders is a challenge.

Program Results

One reason the vocational education establishment in Pensacola has accepted the involvement of JTPA (and its associated rules and monitoring) is that the program has helped maintain enrollment in vocational education, in the face of pressures that might well have resulted in decreases. Because more students mean continued jobs for vocational education teachers and administrators, vocational education staff have been willing to make program adjustments for disadvantaged students that they might otherwise have resisted. One such change is the integration of basic skills instruction into vocational education classes, which occurs to some extent in all of Pensacola's vocational education classes but especially in those that enroll concentrations of disadvantaged students. The emphasis on basic skills is reinforced through extensive use of CAI for all vocational education students scoring below grade level in reading and math.

JTPA has also brought disadvantaged adults into the shared-time center for both the day and evening programs. Center faculty and staff report that

these older students are an asset because they are more goal-oriented and they help the younger students focus realistically on the consequences of their academic and career decisions. In addition, their presence helps ensure jobs for the center's staff.

The program is experiencing steadily increasing success in helping students obtain permanent jobs. In FY 1988, the Pensacola program placed 467 disadvantaged youth in permanent jobs as a result of its special programming for such students. This total is up from 300 the preceding year and 206 in FY 1986.

Detroit: Provision of Supplementary Services to Students Moving into a Depressed Job Market

The central problem for young workers seeking jobs in Detroit is the area's changing economy. Although the auto manufacturing and supply firms attracted workers from around the country for many years, sharp declines in these industries have curtailed many jobs throughout the region. As the local economy shifts to a greater reliance on services, young job-seekers find themselves competing with experienced workers, whom employers tend to favor because of their maturity and skills. Young people find themselves shut out of the traditional auto-related jobs that remain because of employer and union preference for hiring laid-off workers.

Although the Detroit Public Schools have experienced serious fiscal problems due to the region's declining economy, the vocational education program is notable for its grand facilities, built as a result of a federal court order. In 1975 the court ordered the construction of five vocational-technical centers that would draw students from throughout the school system and thereby promote racial desegregation. The resulting modern,

well-equipped, and well-maintained shared-time centers do indeed draw high school students citywide, even though racial desegregation is no longer a goal.

An important problem that vocational educators in Detroit face at this point is declining enrollment in vocational programs and courses, resulting from increased high school graduation requirements in math, foreign language, and science. In addition, local pressure on principals to raise test scores in academic subjects has led them to push students to take more academic and fewer vocational courses, according to vocational educators we interviewed.

A related set of pressures affecting vocational education in Detroit is fiscal and political. Because of competition from other instructional programs, the school system has been unable to match the Perkins Act funds available for services to disadvantaged students and therefore has not received all the federal funds to which it is entitled for serving these students.

Job-related Needs of Disadvantaged Youth

According to the director of vocational services to "special needs" students, young people in Detroit need different types of skills to obtain jobs today from those needed by an earlier generation of workers. "There is greater demand for skilled workers who can communicate--read, write, and express themselves well; who are flexible and adaptable; who have initiative. Employers want workers who have team spirit, get along with people, and know how to work cooperatively." While high school dropouts could obtain "middle-class" jobs in earlier times, that is no longer the case. The vocational education program differs with business leaders on one

important aspect of students' needs, however. As the special needs director stated:

> Business people have stood up and said in front of us that they can teach students better than we can . . . that schools just need to teach them to read and write and that businesses will teach them specific occupational skills. . . . Businesses say that the only thing schools need to do is get students job-ready--to dress well, be punctual, and the like--and they will teach them the specific job skills. I think that orientation is totally wrong.

This administrator said that occupational training is indeed important to most students in obtaining their initial and subsequent jobs.

One important caveat to any consideration of student needs in Detroit (as in many other places) is that the neediest youth are never exposed to the vocational education system. These are the students who drop out of school before tenth or eleventh grade, when vocational programs begin. Although every school system we visited had significant numbers of dropouts, the numbers in Detroit are particularly high (over 50 percent). The other, brighter side of this problem, however, is that, once students embark on a vocational program, they are unlikely to drop out of school.

On a relative scale, Detroit's population of disadvantaged youth experience particularly serious problems. Knowing how few good jobs there are tends to discourage all but the most ambitious from vigorously pursuing their education. Similarly, students come in contact with relatively few adults who can help them learn about careers and find good jobs.

Occupational Training

The shared-time centers offer skills training in about 20 occupational clusters, all of which use what are termed "performance-based" curricula. "To complete a program, a student must master a set of specific skills and be able to do a set of specific tasks," according to one program

administrator. The Detroit program has established performance standards in each occupational area to ensure that "a student can perform at the level of incumbent workers."

To provide extra support to low-achieving, handicapped, and limited English proficient (LEP) students, the school system sponsors a special needs program that is intended to help these students "gain academic, occupational, interpersonal, and employability skills needed for securing and maintaining full-time employment upon program completion and graduation from high school" (as stated in a program summary). The program consists of supplementary services in the five shared-time centers, which are provided by paraprofessional instructors in vocational classrooms, LEP "advocates," special education consultants, and vocational evaluators as well as professional guidance counselors.

Students in the special needs program receive extra help but are expected to meet the same performance and course requirements as are other students. Their main source of assistance is the paraprofessional instructors assigned to classrooms and shops enrolling concentrations of special needs students. These instructors provide small-group and individualized instruction to special needs students, either in class or in pullout sessions. Paraprofessional instructors are also expected to help their students consider employment options and develop realistic career plans.

Special needs students are required to become active members of the student vocational organization related to their occupational program. The rationale for this requirement is that the clubs give students an opportunity to develop friendly relationships with teachers and other

students involved in their occupational area and in so doing promote a sense of belonging and membership in a larger enterprise. The clubs also provide opportunities for students to be recognized for their special abilities and achievements.

Transition Services

The responsibilities of the paraprofessional instructors include assistance with transition services as well as occupational training. From the perspective of the disadvantaged student, transition services consist mainly of extra staff attention and assistance within the environment of the shared-time center, as described below. When work experience is available, it is provided on an unpaid basis and for only a few weeks.

Basic skills instruction. The assistance provided by paraprofessional instructors includes remediation of basic skills deficiencies, using curricula geared to the occupational area (e.g., students in carpentry work on math problems related to measurements of raw materials and building designs). A program administrator described the program's objectives in this area: "Basic skills training is not given simply to raise reading or math levels; it is given for those skills that are prerequisite for program success."

Employability training. These skills are taught in a number of contexts because, as one counselor said, employability skills "are hard to teach, especially when they are not reinforced at home or the home high school." Some occupational teachers organize their classes as though they were job sites, with the expectation that students will interact with them as they would with their supervisor on the job and that they will work cooperatively with their fellow students. In addition, special mini-lessons

provide training in preparing resumes and job applications, interview techniques, proper dress, punctuality, work habits, and interpersonal skills. These lessons also include instruction in looking for, obtaining, keeping, and terminating a job.

Work experience. The centers' focus on job-relevant classroom training. Relatively few cooperative education placements are arranged because of a rule that students must complete two years of vocational training before they are eligible for cooperative education. Since most vocational programs are only two years in duration, cooperative education is ruled out for those students. However, even for students participating in three-year programs, there are relatively few cooperative education slots available.

The school system does not have access to JTPA wage subsidies for cooperative education placements. Program staff said that Detroit's JTPA youth funds go to other local agencies and community-based organizations.

Supervised work experience without pay is available to many of the eleventh- and twelfth-graders enrolled in the shared-time centers. Students work for a half-day four days a week over a five-week period. The fifth day each week is spent at the center discussing their experiences at the work site with a teacher and other students.

Other services. Special needs students receive more counseling services than do other vocational education students (i.e., student/counselor ratio at the shared-time centers is 200/1 for special needs students and 400/1 for other vocational education students). In one center we visited, each counselor selects 20 students with particularly serious needs and provides them with "concentrated counseling support" that involves

checking their attendance daily, reviewing their classroom performance frequently through conferences with the students and their teachers, and serving as a liaison with the students' parents and home high schools.

Placement. Placement specialists and occupational teachers are responsible for working with twelfth-graders to arrange placements in jobs or further training. We were told that the district's placement specialists and teachers have no problem finding jobs in areas such as food services and merchandising, but fields such as auto mechanics, air conditioning/ refrigeration, and multi-media offer few placements. It was not clear whether this information is communicated to incoming students as they decide on occupational areas to pursue. When suitable placements cannot be found for disadvantaged students, they are referred to other programs, including JTPA programs for adults and the local Employment Service, which will continue to work with the young person after high school completion.

Program Results

In 1987-88 there were 1,074 special needs students in the five shared-time centers. Of the special needs students graduating in the preceding school year, 48 percent obtained jobs or enrolled in postsecondary education or training. This percentage may not include graduates who found jobs or arranged postsecondary placements on their own, however.

Program staff described a number of problems in helping students find jobs. For example, "Students place limits on themselves. . . . [S]ome insist on working near their homes, have sick parents, lack employability skills, don't get to the interview on time." Also, Detroit's poor public transportation system makes it hard for young people to commute to jobs.

Staff also said that although entry-level jobs are available for special needs graduates, the jobs often lack benefits or career ladders, and wages tend to be low. Students who take these jobs right after high school sometimes become discouraged by the long commutes and hard work and decide to quit, according to program staff.

New Castle: Business Involvement in Serving and Placing Disadvantaged Youth

New Castle is a small city in east central Indiana. Although manufacturing once dominated the city's economy, the service industry has now become dominant, especially in health fields. The city aggressively recruits new business and points to its skilled work force as a key attraction of the region.

The school system has had a long partnership with federal employment training programs, including programs under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) and JTPA. The number of JTPA youth training slots has decreased recently, however, as a result of pressures to devote more JTPA resources to retraining dislocated workers. As in Pensacola, the school system subcontracts with the local JTPA administrative entity for the provision of training services to JTPA-eligible youth. Among the services available through this arrangement are wage subsidies to employers hiring JTPA-eligible students in cooperative education positions.

Job-related Needs of Disadvantaged Youth

As is true across the country, increases in high school graduation requirements, especially in English and math, have sparked decreases in vocational education enrollment in New Castle. Taking both the required academic courses and a complete vocational program is becoming harder and harder for vocational education students and especially so for students who

have difficulties in their academic courses. To increase vocational enrollments, according to one district administrator, "vocational education will have to start in grades eight and nine."

Disadvantaged youth are concentrated in two high-poverty neighborhoods in New Castle. According to district staff, one of these neighborhoods consists mainly of crowded, single-parent households, headed by long-term welfare recipients. The other neighborhood includes many families headed by unemployed factory workers who have chosen not to look for other types of jobs or to relocate to areas where more jobs are available. Many teenagers in the two communities drop out of high school before graduation.

Program staff identified the following employment-related problems of these disadvantaged youth:

- Basic and occupational skills that are inadequate for a highly competitive labor market;
- Lack of work ethic--"these students have not internalized the work ethic, dependability, pride in work and oneself, and sense of belonging";
- Inadequate support from the family to prepare for employment and then to find and keep a job; and
- Inadequate job seeking skills--"they just don't have the skills to get their foot in the door . . . don't know how to fill out an application, dress, present themselves."

Employers we interviewed said that they value "independence, initiative, and a willingness to learn." According to the district's disadvantaged youth program coordinator, "Many employers are willing to work with occupational skill deficient students," so long as the students have internalized these other traits.

Occupational Training

The New Castle Public Schools are part of a consortium of school systems that share resources and facilities for providing vocational education. Students in the consortium districts may take vocational courses in the New Castle Area Vocational School or in any of the six regional high schools, depending on their interests and the availability of course slots.

Most of the occupational training programs have adopted skill competencies for purposes of structuring their curriculum and for measuring student progress. Occupational teachers are not required to use the competencies, however.

The occupational training program emphasizes cooperation with local employers. This cooperation is channeled through advisory councils in each occupational area, which assist in finding cooperative education placements, donate equipment and materials, define curriculum focus, and anticipate employment trends. For example, local industries have provided the metal used in the machine tool operation courses and in 1988 contributed prizes to student winners of a machine tool competition. The district holds a banquet for cooperating businesses each year, awards certificates of appreciation to them, and publishes newsletters recognizing their assistance and contributions.

Transition Services

Disadvantaged students in New Castle receive two main types of transition services. The first is access to JTPA assistance, including wage subsidies to employers who hire them in cooperative education positions. The second is the services of the youth services coordinator, who acts as a counselor and advocate for JTPA-eligible students, helping them to obtain

all types of needed services, securing special permissions as necessary, and serving as a friend and resource. Although she is a certified teacher and a school system employee, her office is located in the same building as the local JTPA administrative entity, permitting her to refer students to JTPA service providers conveniently. Because the program is concerned about preventing students from being labeled as "disadvantaged," an effort is made to protect the privacy of JTPA-eligible students and, for example, not to let it be known to other students when JTPA funds are being used to subsidize a cooperative education placement.

Basic skills instruction. JTPA-eligible students needing basic skills instruction are referred to classes offered by the Adult Basic Education Program or to the JTPA computer lab located at the JTPA offices.

Employability training. In addition to the employability training offered to all vocational education students, JTPA-eligible youth receive intensive services from the youth services coordinator. These consist of seminars on behaviors and attitudes acceptable in the workplace, on resume writing and portfolio development, and on job seeking. Students also participate in practice interviews with real employers, which are taped and reviewed with the student.

Work experience. Vocational education students obtain both paid and unpaid work experience. In "extended labs," students work for an employer on an unpaid basis as part of an occupational training course. In cooperative education, students spend 15 hours a week working in a paid job and participate in five hours a week of related classroom instruction. Cooperative education placements last two semesters and are open only to seniors.

JTPA-eligible students participate in the same programs, except that half of their cooperative education wages may be reimbursed by JTPA. Also the youth services coordinator will assist the vocational teacher in finding and arranging the cooperative education placement and will also provide special help to the student in preparing for and carrying out the job. For example, she visits each JTPA work site regularly to check on the student's progress and assist in resolving problems.

In addition to these opportunities, JTPA resources can also be used to arrange other types of placements, including occupational skill training by a potential employer if the skill training is not offered by one of the consortium schools.

Other services. The youth services coordinator refers students to outside agencies as needed to address problems that are barriers to learning and employment. For example, students are put in contact with appropriate agencies for child care, prenatal and other medical assistance, and treatment of drug and alcohol abuse.

Students learn budgeting by planning and raising money for the employers' banquet each year. While participating in cooperative education, students open a bank account and deposit money each week. They also learn about job benefits, taxes, safety regulations, employment security, and workmen's compensation.

Placement. Occupational teachers have primary responsibility for working with vocational students to find permanent jobs. The youth services coordinator assists these teachers in finding jobs for JTPA-eligible youth and utilizes the placement services of the JTPA administrative entity where appropriate. Often employers who provide cooperative education placements

will hire these students as soon as they graduate, or they will recommend the student to an employer whom they know.

Program Results

Approximately 45 JTPA-eligible students received special services last year. No outcome data are available on their completion of high school or their placement in permanent jobs or further training.

Pittsburgh: Early Intervention with the Most Disadvantaged Students

Like Detroit, Pittsburgh is also experiencing significant employment change as its economic emphasis shifts from heavy industry to high technology and services. The Pittsburgh Public Schools have taken several steps to address the problems of economic dislocation and joblessness that have accompanied this shift. One of the most publicized has been the elimination of the "general" track in high school; after the 1988-89 school year, students will be required to declare themselves as either academic or vocational majors. School system administrators made this change in response to observations that general track students found it harder to obtain jobs than did vocational students. Student follow-up surveys indicated that general track students who graduate from high school are three times more likely to be unemployed than are vocational graduates; vocational track students who drop out of school are 50 percent more likely to obtain jobs than are general track students who have dropped out. By eliminating the general track, administrators expect students to focus their intentions earlier, thus permitting the schools to serve what they call the "neglected majority" more effectively. When the change is fully implemented, the district anticipates that the vocational track will attract

about 70 percent of all high school students, with the remainder enrolling in the academic track.

A related objective of the school system has been to identify the most disadvantaged students in the early secondary grades and to provide them with a series of articulated services that are designed to keep them in school until graduation. In vocational education, this focus has resulted in a continuum of related programs aimed at addressing the needs of disadvantaged students at several different ages.

Job-related Needs of Disadvantaged Youth

The school system believes that every disadvantaged youth needs a high school diploma and training that will permit him or her to obtain a job or further education upon high school graduation. In addition to reducing unemployment, the school system wants to address problems of underemployment as well. In recent years, more and more of the city's young people with poor job-related skills have found themselves in permanent part-time jobs with little hope of advancement or even movement into full-time employment.

The Pittsburgh Public Schools recently initiated work under a $12 million grant from the Casey Foundation that is intended to improve interagency collaboration in serving at-risk youth. The district expects this work to result in increased attention in the seventh through tenth grades to instruction in career awareness, life skills, employability skills, and occupational skill training. As part of the proposal for this grant, the school system surveyed high school students to determine what they believed the schools should do to assist at-risk youth. The recommendations were as follows:

- More experiential learning;
- More individualized attention using methods such as mentoring, tutoring, and peer counseling;
- Better information on the consequences of dropping out of school;
- Consistent follow-up and attention while in school; and
- Interventions to counter the impersonal and alienating atmosphere created by standardized curricula and computerization of schedules and grades.

Occupational Training

Each of Pittsburgh's 10 comprehensive high schools offers vocational education programs. In addition, the district supports a magnet vocational-technical high school that can accommodate up to 1,000 students and offers training in 50 different trades or occupations. A "high-tech" magnet program at one comprehensive high school and a business-finance program organized on the academy model are also among the occupational education options available to students in the district. However, the school-to-work transition services described below do not uniformly require that participating students enroll in classroom-based vocational education.

Transition Services

Pittsburgh has established several programs that are intended to prevent students from dropping out and assist them in the transition to employment. The largest of these is the Project SET (Select Employment Trainee) program, which has been in place for 15 years and serves 2,000 students annually through the provision of cooperative education placements and tutoring. The district also offers three related programs for disadvantaged youth:

- OASES serves eighth-graders who have serious academic or behavioral problems. In the four participating middle schools, OASES students spend half their school day in regular academic

subjects and the other half in a prevocational lab. During their lab periods, students work on community-oriented projects that provide opportunities to work together as a team and obtain practical experience. The projects generally involve "real" work at a site in the community and can entail activities such as construction of a stage or bookshelves and interior or exterior painting.

- The Summer Academy is an academic program for students who have failed eighth grade. It allows these students to make up their academic courses so that they can enter ninth grade in the fall. Students receive $4.00 a day for good attendance and cooperation during the academic portion of the program. If they complete the program successfully, they are placed in a job for the remainder of the summer.

- Second Chance serves ninth-graders identified during the first three quarters of the school year as being in danger of failing. In the fourth quarter they are placed in a self-contained classroom for intensive instruction in four academic subjects. They also receive $4.00 a day and can obtain a summer job through the program.

In addition to these programs, the district provides several other afterschool and summer employment programs aimed primarily at disadvantaged youth, enabling them to receive special services on a continuing basis--both during the school year and in the summer--from the eighth through the twelfth grades. From the perspective of the student, this series of opportunities serves as a continuous safety net, following the student from year to year and making it possible for him or her to stay in school while also gaining exposure to the world of work.

Basic skills instruction. One of the most innovative features of Project SET is its tutoring component. Started as a pilot project with Perkins Act money, the program employs under-utilized vocational teachers to work as tutors and mentors with up to 100 disadvantaged students each. The students, generally eleventh- and twelfth-graders, are referred to the tutors if their grades are low and they are in danger of failing. In interviews, tutors described their responsibilities as providing help to

students with their vocational and related courses, personal and programmatic counseling, career education, and "general support." Where appropriate, tutors also arrange for students to obtain other types of assistance. Once referred for tutoring, students are required to meet with their tutors a minimum of twice a month, but some come more frequently. Many students request tutoring before they are formally referred. Starting in 1988, every at-risk ninth-grader is assigned a tutor.

Interviews with students who receive tutoring assistance indicated that they see the service as mainly a source of remedial help. From the problems they described, these students seem to experience regular clashes with their teachers. They reported "not getting" the material because the teacher was boring or refused to answer their questions or did not review enough before tests. In contrast, they said that the tutors gave them individual attention and exhibited a great deal of patience.

Employability training. In addition to covering employability skills in occupational courses, the district looks to work experience opportunities as a key means of teaching employability skills. The paraprofessional Vo-Tech Assistants provide the primary support system for students in this area.

Work experience. Pittsburgh has a comprehensive cooperative education program designed to serve large numbers of students, emphasizing the placement of disadvantaged students in supervised work situations. Some students are placed in jobs directly related to a vocational education program--the classic cooperative education model. These students are supervised by certified, full-time cooperative education coordinators. Unlike many other school systems, however, Pittsburgh does not limit

participation in cooperative education to vocational program concentrators. Indeed, a large proportion of the school system's cooperative education placements are specifically reserved for disadvantaged students, who may or may not be available in vocational education programs.

Cooperative education is the centerpiece of Project SET. Participants must be 16 years old, although they may be in any grade. Approximately 1,000 students receive cooperative job placements through this program annually. Disadvantaged students who participate in cooperative education are encouraged but not required to enroll in a vocational education program. Placements tend to be in service-related industries.

The paraprofessional Vo-Tech Assistants are a particularly important feature of Pittsburgh's cooperative education program. Along with the professionally certified cooperative education coordinators, the Assistants are housed in school guidance offices. They recruit students to the SET program based on their attendance, grades, and eligibility for free lunch. In addition to finding cooperative placements for SET participants, the Vo-Tech Assistants also work with students in an informal guidance capacity, encouraging them to stay in school, study hard enough to earn decent grades, and generally beat the cycle of failure in which they may find themselves.

Once a student is placed in a cooperative job, Vo-Tech Assistants visit the work site to meet with the employer but do not necessarily visit while the student is on the job. They ask employers to complete an evaluation form for each student, which includes assessments of student appearance, attendance, punctuality, response to supervision, interest, and quality of work. Because many students cannot afford public transportation until they

receive their first paycheck, Vo-Tech Assistants supply bus passes to participants during their first month on the job.

Placement. Placement in permanent jobs (as well as cooperative placements and summer and after-school jobs) is coordinated centrally by a districtwide office. Staffed by 60 professionals and paraprofessionals (including the Vo-Tech Assistants), the placement office works with approximately 800 employers and utilizes a large job bank established by the school system. The district's director of vocational education urges job developers to capitalize on employers' urge to "do something socially responsible." One placement specialist said that they often experience problems in finding students to take the jobs that employers need filled.

Program Results

The district reports that over 80 percent of its graduates start jobs, enroll in postsecondary education or training, or enlist in the military services shortly after high school completion. It reports a combined postsecondary education and job placement rate of 87 percent for vocational education students. Since district administrators report that 85 percent of the district's students (but not necessarily its graduates) are disadvantaged, it is likely that these students constitute a large proportion of any statistics that the system compiles.

Comparative Features of Vocational Education Services to Disadvantaged Students in These Communities

The vocational education services provided to disadvantaged students in these four communities reflect important similarities. Most significantly, the services have been designed and implemented to address--at some level--the special employment-related needs that these youth experience. Managers

of these programs characterize the needs mainly in terms of helping students (1) develop a "work ethic," (2) improve their communication skills (including basic academic skills), and (3) graduate from high school.

Two major (and closely related) classes of transition services that disadvantaged students receive in these communities are (1) supervised work experience and (2) intensive, one-on-one assistance from professional or paraprofessional staff members. Other important categories of transition services in these districts are early intervention with potential dropouts, special instruction in basic skills, employability training, and placement in permanent jobs after high school. With each of these services except one-on-one assistance, disadvantaged students receive more but not fundamentally different services from those provided to nondisadvantaged students. What distinguishes much of the transition service provided to disadvantaged students is its intensity and duration.

The major differences among transition services in these four districts stem from (1) local employment conditions and (2) the educational goals of the school districts. Pensacola, for example, designs its transition services to permit disadvantaged students to obtain jobs with career ladders, because its local economic conditions virtually assure entry-level jobs to all job-seekers. As a matter of educational philosophy (reinforced by statements of local employers), the school district believes that reading and math proficiencies are essential for disadvantaged students to obtain jobs with career ladders. As a result Pensacola's transition services focus on (1) improving the basic academic skills of disadvantaged youth and (2) taking advantage of abundant entry-level job opportunities to provide

cooperative education (using JTPA-funded wage subsidies as appropriate) to all interested students.

In contrast, Detroit's transition program--and indeed its vocational education program generally--places highest priority on classroom training in occupational skills. This orientation results from three factors, including (1) the large investment in modern vocational classroom and lab facilities, which the federal court ordered in the 1970s as part of a city-wide desegregation plan; (2) the local requirement for two years of classroom vocational training before students are eligible for cooperative education placements; and (3) the poor job opportunities in the region, which make work experience placements difficult to arrange. Transition services for disadvantaged students consist mainly of intensive classroom support provided by paraprofessionals and special counseling support from guidance personnel assigned to work with disadvantaged students enrolled in the shared-time vocational centers.

In New Castle, the vocational education program promotes extensive involvement by local employers in virtually all aspects of service delivery. This orientation also characterizes the transition services provided to disadvantaged students. A key component of these services is placement, as appropriate, in JTPA-subsidized cooperative education slots, which the district's transition services director locates and monitors. Other types of special assistance that she provides include counseling and referral to special support services, including health services, basic skills remediation, and child care.

Pittsburgh's program for disadvantaged students is distinguished by its emphasis on early intervention in the schooling of very disadvantaged

students. Intervention begins in the early secondary grades and includes community-oriented work activities and intensive academic remediation during the school year and summer. In high school, disadvantaged students are (1) assigned tutors, who work on an individual basis with disadvantaged students, and (2) encouraged to participate in cooperative education. These activities are intended to complete the continuum of special support services began in the early secondary grades.

IV. Alternatives for Improving the Federal Role in the Delivery of Transition Services to Disadvantaged Youth

This chapter analyzes (1) information about the employment-related problems that disadvantaged youth experience and (2) program data gathered from the four communities described in Chapter III and from previous research, in order to identify alternatives for improving the effectiveness of the Perkins Act in serving this population.

The types of legislative strategies that are realistically available for improving the transition services provided to disadvantaged youth in vocational education programs include the following:

- o Exhortations to address certain problems

  These are usually in the form of statements of principle or intent. They are useful to local reformers who may need to strengthen their cases for program change by citing federal support for their positions.

- o Demonstrations of promising service approaches

  For approaches that have been shown to be effective in various settings, federal sponsorship of demonstrations can help to (1) validate the critical elements of the approach and (2) publicize it among relevant audiences.

- o Incentives to encourage desirable behaviors

  Such incentives can include (1) federal waivers of certain restrictions in return for local adoption of desirable practices and (2) provision of federal funds to defray developmental costs associated with the local adoption of desired practices.

- o Service requirements

  These are requirements for providing certain types of services to program beneficiaries. The Perkins Act currently mandates specified services to certain students (including the disadvantaged) whose participation in vocational education is assisted under the setaside programs. See page 7 of this report.

By contrast, the following are probably not realistically feasible as new federal strategies for improving the delivery of transition services:

- o Initiatives that require significant spending increases

  Recent constraints on federal spending are likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

- o Introduction of major new restrictions on the use of federal funds

  Sizable new constraints on the use of federal vocational education dollars are unlikely to be either productive or politically feasible. Because the federal contribution to overall funding for vocational education is relatively small, school systems will refuse to accept the Perkins money if it comes with too many strings attached.

Given the limited range of feasible alternatives, federal decisionmakers will need to set clear priorities for improvements in transition services to the disadvantaged.

Establishment of a New Federal Priority to Promote Better Links Between Disadvantaged Youth and Employers

As indicated in Chapter II, disadvantaged youth exhibit important differences from other youth with regard to their everyday connections to employers and jobs. These differences tend to result in disadvantaged youth having fewer appropriate role models and mentors, less knowledge about careers and job openings, and less experience in observing and practicing the attitudes and behaviors that employers value. On the employers' side, these differences tend to result in negative stereotypes about the abilities and work habits of disadvantaged youth.

A new federal priority on improving the linkages between disadvantaged youth and employers could serve as a vehicle for a range of improvements in vocational education programs. These improvements include (1) better information networks for students about careers and jobs and (2) more

student exposure to appropriate role models who can demonstrate the attitudes and skills that are important in the workplace. In addition, other improvements could flow from greater employer involvement in the preparation of disadvantaged youth for jobs, including the following:

- Greater employer input into curricular decisions, especially in (1) occupational areas in which there are likely to be local changes in the demand for workers and (2) non-occupational skills that local employers find particularly important; and
- Greater employer involvement as program resources, including contributions of time (for practice interviews and other types of employability training), materials, and equipment useful in occupational skill training.

In order to design federal program provisions to implement this priority, it is useful to identify the program components that are particularly important in promoting these linkages at the local level.

Local Program Components That Promote Employer Linkages

Our analysis indicates four program components that play key roles in encouraging the creation of employer linkages with disadvantaged youth. They are (1) early intervention; (2) availability of tutors, mentors or advocates; (3) supervised work experience; and (4) placement assistance.[1] Each of these components constitutes a school-to-work transition service, in the sense that it (1) is supplementary to the occupational skill training that is the heart of vocational education programming at the secondary level and (2) contributes to the ability of vocational education participants,

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[1] Two other transition services important in the communities described in Chapter III--basic skills instruction and employability training--are not included here. Basic skills instruction is not suitable for highlighting as a federal vocational education priority because it is the subject of another major federal assistance program. Employability training is generally so closely tied to occupational skill training that it seems to us unnecessary to emphasize it further as a critical transition component.

especially disadvantaged students, to obtain jobs after high school. None of the four components is emphasized in current federal programming.

Early Intervention

This component differs from the other four because its place is early in the secondary grades (e.g., seventh or eighth grade), rather than at the end of high school. Early intervention services operated in conjunction with vocational education generally have two main purposes:

- To identify students who are at risk of dropping out and provide them with special services that will help them stay in school until graduation; and
- To provide career information and work experiences that will permit these students to begin thinking realistically about their eventual employment and, in so doing, help them understand the relationship between education and job success.

Although the dropout prevention purpose of these early intervention programs is important, the exposure to career information and work situations can be just as valuable as a precursor to students' transition to employment.

Pittsburgh's early intervention efforts are notable not only because they reflect both of these purposes but also because they are linked together to form continuing support for very disadvantaged students, stretching from eighth grade through each school year and summer until high school graduation. Unlike other prevocational programs serving young disadvantaged students, the Pittsburgh's program moves students out of the classroom and into community service and work situations as early as eighth grade, thus affording students the opportunity to interact with work-site supervisors at an early age. For very disadvantaged students, this begins a series of work opportunities during school terms and summers that can help them learn how to interact with employers and how to perform successfully in a job.

Recent amendments to the federal Chapter 1 program (included in the Augustus F. Hawkins-Robert T. Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988--P.L. 100-297) authorize discretionary grants for early intervention programs. Under a new "Part C--Secondary School Programs for Basic Skills Improvement and Dropout Prevention and Reentry," school districts may use funds for dropout prevention and reentry activities that include "effective programs for early intervention designed to identify at-risk students in elementary and early secondary school" (Section 1103(c)(3) of P.L. 100-297). As part of the application for these funds (not yet appropriated), a school district must show how it will coordinate funded programs with programs for secondary students supported under the Perkins Act.

The Perkins Act notes prevocational training as an allowable activity under Part B--Program Improvement, Innovation, and Expansion (Section 251(a)(14) of the Act). No provisions in the Act limit the authority of local grant recipients to fund prevocational or early intervention programs with Perkins Act funds, but they are not encouraged or noted except in Part B.

Availability of Tutors, Mentors, or Advocates

Each of the four programs visited in this study relies to varying extents on adults serving in one-on-one consultative and advisory relationships with disadvantaged youth. For example:

- In Detroit, paraprofessional "special instructors" and professional guidance counselors work one-on-one with disadvantaged students, assisting them with classwork in their occupational skills courses, tutoring them in job-related basic skills, monitoring their attendance, and advising them on plans for the future.

- In New Castle, the youth services coordinator provides counseling, placement (in both paid and unpaid work experience assignments and permanent jobs), supervision in work experience positions, and referral assistance to disadvantaged youth who are JTPA-eligible.

- In Pittsburgh, paraprofessional Vo-Tech Assistants provide academic tutoring to disadvantaged students, help place and monitor these students in cooperative education positions, and later assist them in obtaining permanent jobs.

- In Pensacola, vocational education teachers and professional "occupational specialists" help students obtain paid and unpaid work experience and permanent jobs.

Whatever their formal responsibilities, these adults serve as role models and advisors for the disadvantaged students in their charge and intermediaries with students' current and potential employers. Their efforts result in lower adult-to-student ratios for disadvantaged students, compared to the ratios for nondisadvantaged students in the same places.

The Perkins Act does not mention this type of service specifically, although it does require disadvantaged and handicapped students in programs receiving assistance under either of those setasides to receive "guidance, counseling, and career development activities conducted by professionally trained counselors who are associated with the provision of such special services; and counseling services designed to facilitate the transition from school to post-school employment and career opportunities" (Section 204(c) of the Act). These services are subsumed in those we have described here, but the Perkins requirement does not contemplate the range of tutoring, mentoring, and advocacy services we perceive as useful.

Supervised Work Experience

Three of the school systems we visited place high priority on supervised, paid work experience, or cooperative education. The fourth makes special efforts to simulate the workplace in its vocational classrooms

and shops and offers opportunities for unpaid, short-term work experience; it provides longer-term cooperative education to only a few students, however.

Other districts, including some with carefully designed and implemented vocational education programs serving disadvantaged students, de-emphasize work experience for reasons such as the following (Hayward et al., 1988):

- Because of increased graduation requirements and/or long lists of vocational education competencies that students must attain, there may be no room for work experience opportunities in students' course schedules.
- The school system may believe that part-time jobs detract from students' attention to their school work and so may not offer work experience.

There is ample evidence indicating the beneficial effects of work experience, especially cooperative education, for disadvantaged youth. Work experience participants have better program completion rates, employment opportunities, placement rates, employment stability, and job satisfaction than nonparticipants (Brailsford, 1982; Ginsburg, 1982; Mangum & Walsh, 1978; Winer & Kane, 1985). Welch and Erwin (1986) report, however, that work experience is less likely to benefit the truly disadvantaged because they may be denied access to cooperative education by academic achievement requirements or may be placed in low-skill, low-wage, high-turnover jobs. Meyer and Wise (as cited in Freeman & Wise, 1982) report that the quality of jobs held while in high school has little direct effect on successful transition into employment. This finding suggests that poor jobs should not be avoided out of concern that they will contribute to poor labor market experiences later. What does exert a lasting influence, according to Meyer and Wise, are the individual attributes that young people develop in their initial job experiences.

Several implementation variables are important in maximizing the benefits of work experience. They include the following, all of which usually characterize cooperative education:

- o Careful placement

  Although contradicting the implications of research by Meyer and Wise cited above, it is reasonable to expect that better matches between vocational skill training and work experience placements will improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. These matches are most likely to occur in programs that place priority on student placement and that, for example, use placement success as a measure of staff effectiveness.

- o Supervision

  Coordinated supervision by the employer and vocational program staff improve the relevance of the feedback provided to work experience participants and reinforce the link between schooling and employment success.

- o Wages

  Pay for work experience is important because it (1) encourages the student to perceive the assignment as a "real" job, (2) causes employers to treat the student more like a "real" employee, and (3) provides income to students who are likely to need it.

Another important variable in the effectiveness of work experience opportunities is the availability of wage subsidies, especially in instances in which employers are reluctant to hire disadvantaged students in cooperative education positions. Program experience in Pensacola and New Castle indicates the value of partial wage subsidies as employer incentives. For some disadvantaged students, the subsidies may constitute their only opportunity to participate in cooperative education.

Current provisions of the Perkins Act refer to work experience opportunities, such as the examples given for projects that may be conducted under the Part B Demonstration Programs (Section 411(a)(2)(A) of the Act).

No specific reference is made to providing such services to disadvantaged students, however.

Placement Assistance

Although placement assistance is not always a high-priority activity in vocational education programs, our analysis of the special needs of disadvantaged students indicates that they tend to lack the family and community networks that help nondisadvantaged youth obtain their first permanent jobs. For this reason, placement assistance from the vocational education program tends to be particularly important to these students. In our study, the placement assistance offered to disadvantaged youth in Pensacola and Pittsburgh provide contrasting models:

- In Pensacola, vocational education teachers are responsible for assisting all students, including the disadvantaged, who seek permanent jobs after high school. Disadvantaged students who are JTPA-eligible are also provided the placement services of the local JTPA administrative office and U.S. Employment Service.

- In Pittsburgh, all vocational education students receive assistance in finding permanent jobs from a district-wide placement office that utilizes a large job bank. As part of this process, disadvantaged students receive special assistance from the district's Vo Tech Assistants, who have previously worked with these students in a general support capacity.

Two of the papers commissioned for this study describe strategies for placement assistance that are likely to benefit disadvantaged students:

- Bishop recommends that schools help students develop job-search portfolios, which would include grades in relevant courses, achievement test scores, and a check list of competencies developed in vocational education courses. These portfolios could also include descriptions of (1) relevant awards, (2) other forms of special recognition, and (3) participation in relevant extracurricular activities. Students could use the portfolios in introducing themselves to potential employers.

- Rosenbaum suggests that American schools adopt the Japanese practice of developing close, stable relationships with local employers. In Japan, employers who regularly hire entry-level personnel develop long-term relationships with certain secondary

schools, which in turn incur obligations to provide a stable supply of qualified graduates to the employer. The employer is informally obligated to hire from the same school year in and year out.

The first of these strategies is easy to implement and, although applicable to all vocational education students, would be especially useful to disadvantaged students, who are less likely to have friends and family members able to personally intervene in helping them find jobs. The second strategy requires very different types of employer relationships from those that schools generally establish; such relationships would be likely to result in benefits beyond placement, however, including better matches between training and jobs.

Although placement assistance is authorized in various Perkins Act provisions, it is not specifically required or encouraged in the implementation of services to disadvantaged students.

Possible Changes in the Perkins Act That Could Improve the School-To-Work Transition of Disadvantaged Youth

The following discussion outlines possible changes to the Perkins Act that could improve the transition services provided to disadvantaged youth. These alternatives assume that the overall structure of the disadvantaged provisions in Perkins is not changed.

1. State in law the federal intent to promote better links between disadvantaged youth and employers.

This statement would be tied directly to the provisions authorizing use of the disadvantaged setaside funds. It would not prohibit other state and local priorities for the use of these funds, but it would explicitly establish the federal interest in improving the linkages between disadvantaged youth and employers.

2. Authorize demonstrations of approaches likely to improve such linkages between disadvantaged youth and employers.

The approaches to be demonstrated would include those concerned with the four key transition components discussed earlier in this chapter. The main purpose of the demonstrations would be to try out promising approaches to implementing each of these components, in order (1) to validate the key service elements of each approach and (2) once validated, to disseminate methods of implementing them. To create incentives for the implementation of these demonstrations, earmarked funds could be authorized under Title IV, Part B ("Demonstration Programs"), to support appropriate costs for development and dissemination. Funding priority could be given to proposed demonstrations that involve coordination with Chapter 1 and other compensatory education programs and/or with JTPA.

3. Establish a new set of required services to disadvantaged youth, which are separate from the services required for handicapped students.

Because the two groups exhibit important differences in their needs for and participation in vocational education, consideration should be given to developing separate requirements for services to disadvantaged and handicapped students. These new requirements would replace those currently included in Section 204(c). A new list of required services to disadvantaged students could include the following:

- Assistance from a counselor, tutor, mentor, or advocate, for purposes of (1) developing skills in career planning and personal decisionmaking, (2) developing vocational competencies, and (3) improving educational achievement;
- Assignment to supervised work experience (with pay if feasible), which supplements the student's vocational program; and
- Assistance in obtaining a permanent job upon completion of secondary school for students who seek such employment.

Current legislative requirements to describe vocational education opportunities to disadvantaged students and their parents a year before such opportunities are available (Section 204(b) of the Act) would be retained. If demonstrations of early intervention programs showed such programs to be effective, these requirements for early identification of and communication to disadvantaged students could be expanded.

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